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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5152
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 5841
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 001592

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DEPT FOR AF, AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2018

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MBEKI TO CONTINUE AS SOLE MEDIATOR ON
ZIMBABWE

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Raymond L. Brown. Reason
s 1.4(b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (U) On 18 July, President Mbeki briefed AU Chairperson Jean Ping, UN Special Representative Haile Menkerios, and SADC Organ on Defence Politics and Security Special Representative George Chikoti on the SADC-mandated mediation process in Zimbabwe. According to a public statement by the Presidency, all parties present endorsed President Mbeki as the sole mediator in Zimbabwe. They also pledged to support his efforts, which will include a new reference group consisting of SADC, AU, and UN representatives that will "liaise" with Mbeki on an ongoing basis.

[¶2.](#) (C) According to a Pretoria-based French diplomat, late on 18 July an optimistic Ping reiterated that the mediation process is now a "facilitation," meaning a mediator is no longer needed since both parties are speaking to one another. Ping also said he tried to open up the mediation process to include former Senegalese Prime Minister Moustapha Niasse as a formal AU representative in the facilitation. However, Senegalese President Wade, who has had a notoriously difficult relationship with Niasse, rejected the idea. (NOTE: Niasse also served in 2002 as UN Special Envoy to the Democratic Republic of Congo. END NOTE) The French diplomat added that Mbeki was likely relieved that Wade turned off the proposal and that Ping did not suggest an alternative.

[¶3.](#) (C) Ping also said that the reference group has yet to be stood up, will be on stand-by if needed, and be based in Pretoria. According to Ping, the reference group will stay in Pretoria for two weeks maximum and will include UN Special Representative Menkerios, someone from SADC, and a "civil servant" from the African Union. The French diplomat confided that they have no confidence in either the reference group, which has no real agenda or authority, or in Ping's ability to influence Mbeki as evidenced by Ping's swing from proposing a high-profile co-mediator to a civil servant on a stand-by reference group. He also added that the EU is "uncomfortable" at the moment because targeted EU sanctions are set to go into effect on 22 July. "If MDC signs the MOU," he said, "we will be accused of being out of touch as you have been."

[¶4.](#) (C) COMMENT: After months of pressure and bad publicity both domestically and internationally, President Mbeki appears to have gained some breathing room, at least temporarily, by showing movement from both the MDC and ZANU-PF. However, it remains unclear if Mbeki's success in getting both sides to sign the MoU will have any long-lasting effects or practical implications for Zimbabwe's political impasse or whether a reference group proposed by Mbeki himself will have any bite. END COMMENT.

